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Improving Attention And Emotional Regulation For Middle School Students Through The Use Of Mindfulness Practices

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STAGE 1 – DESIRED RESULTS	
Unit Title: Improving Attention and Emotional Regulation For Middle School Students Using Mindfulness Practices	
Established Goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a set of mindfulness skills that allow students to relate to what’s happening within and around them with more wisdom and compassion. • Analyze and regulate their own emotions using mindfulness practices. 	
Understandings: <i>Students will understand that...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a mindfulness practice is important for academic, social, and emotional growth. • A person’s brain, emotions, and mental state are flexible and can be regulated and strengthened using mindfulness techniques. 	Essential Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is mindfulness and how can it be beneficial to my own life? • How much, if any, control do I have over my mental and emotional states? • Why would I want to practice mindfulness?
Students will know: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that mindfulness is being intentionally aware and open to the present moment. • Stress management and emotional regulation are skills that can be developed through a variety of mindfulness practices. • The brain is malleable and mindfulness is a way to respond to different stressors in our lives. 	Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWBAT explain mindfulness and some of the potential benefits. • SWBAT develop a mindfulness practice and incorporate some of the life skills that are the basis of a mindfulness practice. • SWBAT reflect on which mindfulness practices will be most beneficial to him or her. • SWBAT analyze the effect of a chosen mindfulness technique by comparing self-reported levels of stress for a week.

STAGE 2 – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE	
Performance Tasks: Students will demonstrate meaning-making and transfer by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness Journal: Students will keep a written journal reflecting upon their own mindfulness practice and its benefits to his/her own life. 	Other Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mindfulness Handout, pre and post review, which asks them to explain mindfulness in their own words and different techniques. -Do Nows -Exit Tickets -Flipgrid: Video Reflections.
Key Criteria:	

STAGE 3 – LEARNING PLAN

Summary of Learning Activities: Each lesson will take approximately a week, split up into 20 minute periods,

Lesson One

1. Overview: Mindfulness/Happiness Survey

a. Warmup/Do Now: Make a list of things that make people happy.

Explain to students that we will be studying what is called Positive Psychology (Positive Psychology is the study of what makes people happy.) Show the first 7 minutes of the documentary Happy (on Netflix.) Share that thousands of studies have now been exploring what makes people happy instead of what ails them. Through this research, they have found the following to be true:



b. Watch clip of Happiness. (Available on Netflix titled Happy)

c. Review pie chart of Happiness. Students fill out Post It Notes with examples that fall into all three categories. Students should be able to explain their reasoning. Then, pass out sticky notes that have different examples that would fit into all three categories on them and have students take turns posting them where they fall on the graph. Students will likely struggle to differentiate between intentional activities and life circumstances, so be clear to correct these or have other students correct these using the "My Favorite No" model. [In this model, you or a student defends why an answer is wrong from the standpoint of the "favorite" wrong answer. Example: My favorite "no" is the sticky note that says "the amount of money you make" should be put in the 40% category. It actually belongs in the 10% life circumstances category. This is my favorite no because most people think that money is an intentional activity but it actually is just your situation – even if you work hard for it. It can't buy you happiness.] The more circumstantial events that you can come up with, the better. Students will see that no matter what your life circumstances are, it still only contributes 10% to your happiness. Keep the pie graph visual posted to remind students that 40% of their happiness is in their control.

d. Exit Ticket: Do you think you are born to a certain amount of happiness or can you change it?

Lesson Two

2. How Our Brains Work:

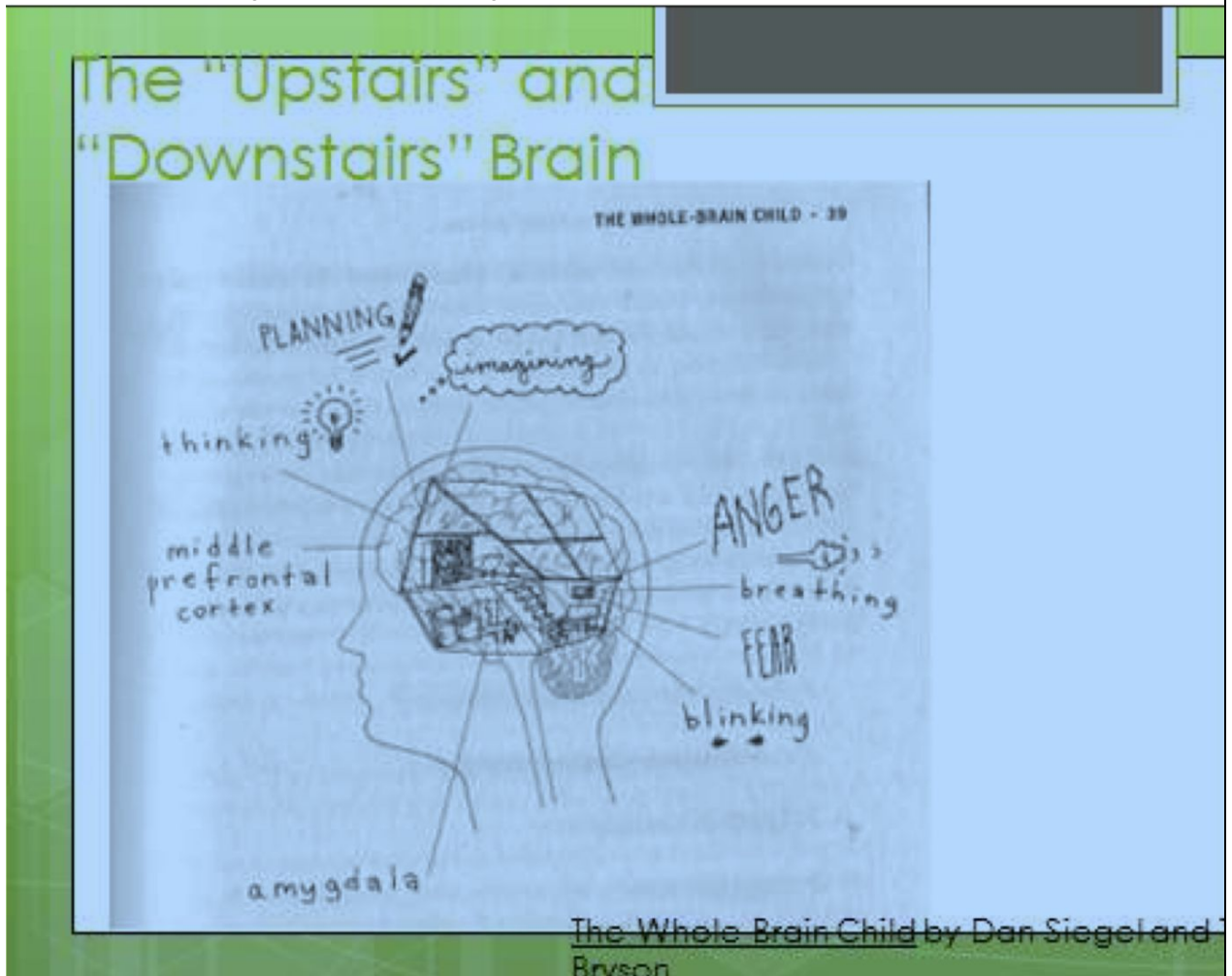
- a. Warmup/Do Now: Can you think of a time when your brain feels all shaken up and confused - like the sand, glitter, and confetti in this shaken bottle? What helps you calm down so you can think?
- b. How Our Brains Work: Teacher models how brain works using a fist. Students will copy teacher with their own fist. Introducing the "brain in the palm of the hand".
Explain that you will use your hand to model a brain.
Point to your wrist. The part that is closest to your spine and near the base of your skull is called the brain stem. It keeps you awake or asleep, makes sure you breathe and makes sure your heart keeps beating. It also keeps you safe.
Fold your thumb across your palm. The middle part of your brain is where you process emotions and store your memories (limbic area). It is also where you have your "safety radar" (your amygdala).
Fold your fingers over your thumb so you have a fist. The outer layer of your brain is called the cortex. It is where your thinking and planning happens.
Point to your fingernails. The area of the cortex that is right up front is the prefrontal cortex. It is where the brain processes information about how we relate to others:
 - Understanding others' feelings
 - Ability to calm ourselves
 - Ability to make choices
 - Morality
 - Ability to sense what is going on for others (read body language)
- c. Flipping our lid.
When we are really stressed or upset, the prefrontal cortex shuts down and no longer works with the rest of our brain.
Lift the fingers up so they are straight and the thumb is still across the palm.
We say, "We flip our lid."
Explain that we "flip our lid" when the thinking part (prefrontal cortex) of our brain isn't working. It becomes hard to use our problem solving skills.
- d. Reflection.
Ask students:
Do you sometimes flip your lid or have you ever been with someone who flipped their lid?" Invite students to share (no names). "What did that look like?" "Feel like?"
"When you are really upset, have you ever done something and later thought, 'Why did I do that?' or 'I really wish I hadn't done that!' or 'What in the world was I thinking when I did that?'" (Allow some thought about why that might happen if the pre-frontal cortex is not working at that time.)

Explain, when you are "flipped" (hand with fingers straight), you can't learn very well either. It really helps to calm back down so that you can solve problems.
- e. A little more brain science: Mirror neurons.
Our brains are built so that we learn by copying. When you see someone yawn do you notice that sometimes you feel like yawning? Even babies copy what they see. Our brains also mirror feelings. When we are with other people who are sad, we can feel their sadness. The nerves (neurons) that do this are called mirror neurons.
Holding up one hand as a "flipped lid" ask students what might happen to someone near that person because of mirror neurons. (They are likely to flip their lid too.)
Holding both hands in the "flipped lid" positions, ask students what might happen if two people approach each other like this. (They might get into a fight.)
What might students need to do to find their thinking brains and solve their problem?
- f. Numbered Heads: Students will be put into groups and be asked to number off (1-4.) Students will be asked a prompt and they will need to get together as a group and answer the question: What might students need to do to find their thinking brains and solve problems? Students will have a couple of minutes to answer the question. When time is up, the teacher will call a number and a person with that number from each group will be the group's spokesperson and share what was discussed to the class.

Lesson Three

3. What is stress and can I control my response to it?

- a. Activity: Stress Ball Throw: Everyone stands in a circle and one stress ball is introduced. The person who has the stress ball can throw it to anyone in the circle; the person remembers who threw it to them and then throws it to someone else. This is repeated until everyone has caught the ball. Then the throw is repeated, throwing to the same person. After the pattern has been established, another ball is introduced and the sequence is started all over again, except with two stress balls. The object of the game is to see how many stress balls can be tossed in the circle without forgetting the sequence, or before the ball is dropped. Debrief afterwards: How easy was it to throw one ball? What were you thinking about? What were you feeling? How challenging was it when there was more than one ball? How did you feel when that happened?
- b. Do Now/Journal: What is stress? Can I control my response to it?
- c. Refresher: How Our Brain Works. With a partner, review the three different parts of the brain, using your hand as a model.
- d. Mini Lecture: Upstairs/Downstairs Brain
Explain that our brains evolved over thousands of years to deal with stressful situations, like being chased by a mountain lion. Those stressful situations only came up once in a while, so it was okay for our brain to handle all of the symptoms (eyes dilating, muscles tensing, blood flowing, heart racing.) Now, we are experiencing stress way more often and even when it isn't necessary.
Explain the analogy of the upstairs and downstairs brain. The upstairs brain is the frontal and pre-frontal cortex that developed last to help us think calmly, imagine, use reason and logic. The downstairs brain developed first to help us kick in all of those survival instincts. If we are always operating in our downstairs brain, we can never get to the upstairs brain where we do our most creative and great thinking. Furthermore, being stuck in the downstairs brain prevents us from working out conflict or handling our emotions.



- e. One Pager: Students share their most important takeaways of the lecture on a single piece of blank paper. The one pager must include three key points and a drawing.

Lesson Four

4. What Is Mindfulness?

- a. Silent Brainstorm: At their tables, students will be asked: "What does it mean to be mindful? If you don't know, take your best guess." Students will write their answer on a sticky note; one note for each idea, without talking. Students will place each note in the center of the table. After about 3 minutes of writing, without talking, students will try as a group to organize the words and concepts written about mindfulness into some kind of order. After about 2 minutes (or when the group decides about the organization), students will choose a group leader and share out their thoughts with the entire class.
- b. George Mumford Mindfulness: Students will watch the video and answer the following questions: How does George Mumford describe mindfulness? Why did he choose to get into mindfulness/meditation? Students will then be asked to add any additional answers (one per Sticky Note) and add it to their lists.
- c. Mindful Activity: Feeling My Feet Students are guided through a 30 second body scan by the teacher, where the focus/anchor point for the student is the soles of their feet. The object is to get the student completely grounded and focused on the feet.
- d. Reflection: How do you feel after doing that activity? Can you think of a time when this exercise would be useful? Are you more calm and focused after this exercise?

Lesson Five

5. Intro To Mindfulness:

a. Mindful Activity: Zip Up: Take a seated position. With one hand at the base of your back and the other in front of your belly, pretend you have a zipper running from your belly button to your chin. Zip yourself up and say "zzzzzzziip", then silently wave your hands above your head in a cheer. Switch hands and do it again. Rest your hands on your knees and notice how you feel.

b. Mindful Breath Counting:

- 1) Lie down and let your body rest. Notice whatever you're thinking right now, however you feel right now.
- 2) When you're ready, take three deep breaths while paying attention to the rising and falling of your belly. We're not trying to do anything special except just notice the sensation — what it feels like.
- 3) Place your hand on your belly. As best as you're able, pay attention to the rocking of your hand with each breath.
- 4) Recognize that your mind will go off somewhere else, over and over again, or you might feel restless — all of that's normal, all of that's totally fine. Each time you notice your attention is gone somewhere else, come back again to your hand rising and falling on your belly.
- 5) If you'd like, count your breaths, sticking to small groups. Perhaps you could count up to five and then start again at one.
- 6) Each time you lose track, simply start over. Note any tendency to get frustrated — there's no need to, the distractions will happen. Breathe in, one, breathe out, one, breathe in, two, breathe out, two, continuing at your own pace... and coming back again to breathing in and breathing out.
- 7) Wherever your mind's gone, allow those thoughts to be for just now. Allow them to show up and then continue on. Thoughts are normal. Everyone has thoughts continually throughout the day, throughout this type of practice.
- 8) Come back gently, and over and over again to the feeling of breathing, right now. Allow thoughts and feelings to show up because they will and then each time come back again.
- 9) Breathe in, one, breathe out, one, breathe in, two, breathe out, two, and then again coming back to the next breath — not trying to fix anything or change anything at that moment, or at this next moment.
- 10) At some other time during the day, there might be something to act on, but right now, simply lie here, guiding your attention to the rocking of your hand, to the sensation of breathing.
- 11) And when you're ready, if you'd like, opening your eyes, or continuing to lie still.

c. Gallery Walk: Students are asked to reflect upon one of the Mindful Activities presented in class today. Students will create a graphic organizer/poster/infographic to represent that activity and what they learned. Students then post them on the wall for students to get up and view different visual representations of understanding.

Lesson Six

6. Mindful Awareness:

- a. Introduce Mindful Journal: Students will be presented with the Mindful Journals. As the students are working through the unit, they will be asked to reflect upon their own experiences. Journals will be collected at the end of the week on Friday. Students will be presented with a template to create one and will be assessed using a rubric.

Link to Rubric:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pjpPu9nBV7_KVa4FdygqB_CJqlCNv4eSiuCS11krjIQ/edit?usp=sharing

Link to Journal:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KdSJT9_9Zd-wBDRbDepjpyEU3Ju9vSfPHTDsUmMmFM/edit?usp=sharing

- b. Minds Together: Can you describe how your body feels when you're stressed? Can you describe what your mind is like when you're stressed? When you feel stressed, can you think clearly?
- c. Shake It Up Activity: Students will be lead by the teacher in an activity incorporating a drum beat to release energy and help focus.
- d. Mindful Behavior vs. Unmindful Behavior: Teacher will explain the role of amygdala and hippocampus, as well as emotional hijacking. Students will work in groups and get a bag of mindful and unmindful examples. Students will have to sort them out and decide which example is mindful vs. unmindful.
- e. Exit Ticket: What is mindful behavior versus unmindful behavior? Think of a unmindfulness behavior you currently have. How can you use mindfulness in order to change that behavior?

Lesson Seven

7. Mindful Awareness:

- a. **Activity: Mirrors!** Students find a partner and each determine who is the leader and who is the “mirror.” The “mirror” will have to duplicate exactly what the leader is doing, like a mirror. The goal is to sync movements, if possible. Students will reflect on the experience afterward “How did that feel?” “How does this relate to mindfulness?”
- b. **Mindful Activity: Slow and Silent Walking.** Students line up and when the bell rings, students are instructed to walk slowly on a taped line in the room. Students are asked to remain silent and notice the feeling in each foot as he/she steps. When they get to the other line, students will slowly turn around and wait for the bell. While waiting, focus in on the breath. When the bell rings, students walk across the room again, slowly.
- c. **Exit Ticket:** What did you notice when you were walking slowly? Can you think of a situation when walking slowly would be useful in daily life?

Lesson Eight

8. Mindful Awareness:

- a. Activity: Solemn and Silent. Instructor informs students this will take self control. Students find a partner and pair up back to back. On the count of three, everyone must face their partner and try to remain serious and solemn. No speaking! The first to laugh or speak must sit down. All who remain standing then take a new partner and the activity continues until only one person has not smiled or laughed.
- b. Mindful Activity: Breath Ball. Using a Hoberman sphere, the teacher will demonstrate 5 mindfulness breaths, synching the breath with the sphere. Each time the instructor breathes in, the sphere will expand. Each time the instructor breathes out, the sphere will contract. The teacher will invite the students to pretend to hold a sphere in front of them and mimic the motions of the teacher. Then, invite one student into the center of the circle. The volunteer will begin breathing with the breath ball. One by one, choose another focused child to join the one in the middle, until the group has all grasped a corner of the breath ball and joins breathing in and out together.
- c. See how many students can breathe together at once! This is another great opportunity to get a group or class to synchronize their minds and bodies all together.
- d. Mindful Journal: Students will have a timed free write (3-5 minutes), where they reflect upon their own experiences with the Mindful Activities.

Lesson Nine

9. Reframing with an Open Mind

- a. Activity: Life is good. Students and the teacher sit in a circle and a ball is rolled back and forth. As we roll a ball back and forth, we name things that bother us, while remembering the good things in life by adding "...and life is good." Debrief: Did this change the way you felt about what bothered you? Why or why not?
- b. Mindful Activity: Duck/Rabbit! Teacher shows a picture of an illustration that could be interpreted as a duck or a rabbit. Students are asked if it is a rabbit or a duck. Students share their responses aloud. Students are asked to look at it again and see if it looks different than before. Discussion to follow about who's right or who's wrong.
- c. Flip: Students are to make a list of their mistakes, failures, and obstacles in life, but after having done so, they must "flip" them so that they are positive. The idea is to allow students the opportunity to self-evaluate, problem solve, and improve themselves. Students will then be placed into groups and the group will brainstorm ideas to help individuals flip their lists.
- d. Mindful Journal: Students will have a timed free write (3-5 minutes), reflecting upon their own experiences with the Mindfulness Activities.

Lesson Ten

10. What's Happening Now

- a. Activity: Mindful Waiting. While we're waiting for the bell to ring, each student chooses a nearby object to focus in on. The students are asked to gently gaze at the object in order to relax and notice what's happening within and around him/her.
- b. Discussion: What did you see? Were you surprised by what you saw? Did your surroundings stay the same? Did they change? How did you feel at first? How did you feel later? Did time pass slowly or quickly?
- c. Mindful Eating: Students are guided in a mindful eating practice, using a Starburst.
- d. Flip Grid: Students will reflect on their mindfulness practice, using Flipgrid, with the following prompt: What have you learned about yourself from doing the mindfulness activities over the past week?.

Lesson Eleven

11. Focus/Mindful Breathing

- a. Game: Simon Says
- b. Counting Breaths: We count breaths to develop concentration. As a class, we will practice three types of breathing.
- c. Choose Your Breathing Anchor: Students are asked to pay attention to the feeling of breathing where they noticed it most-near the nose, chest, or belly.
- d. Mindful Journal

Lesson Twelve

12. Spotlight of Attention

- a. Game: Count to Twenty. Sit or stand in a circle. The idea is for the group to count to twenty, one person saying one number at a time. Anybody can start the count. Then a different person says the next number – but if two or more people happen to speak at the same time, counting must start again from the beginning.
- b. Mindful Activity: Balloon Arms As a class, practice focusing by slowly moving our arms up and down or back and forth, in sync with one another's movement
- c. Mindful Activity: Slowly, Slowly. As a class, practice focusing by paying close attention to sensations in our bodies as we move in slow motion.
- d. Mindful Journal

Lesson Thirteen

13. Out of Our Heads

- a. One Word Story: In a circle, the story is started, with each person in turn adding one word. It usually starts with 'Once – upon – a – time'. The idea is to keep your thoughts free flowing, so that you don't try to guess what is coming or force the story in a particular direction.
- b. Mindful Activity: Mind, Body, Go! Class quickly rolls a ball back and forth as each person quickly names a physical sensation and emotion that they are feeling in the moment.
- c. Mindful Activity: Special Star. As a class, students are asked to sit comfortably and imagine a special star in the night sky that helps relax his/her body and quiet his/her mind.
- d. Mindful Journal

Lesson Fourteen

14. Connecting

- a. Game: Bunnies. The group stands in a circle. First of all they need to know how three people can make a bunny: the middle person holds their hands in front of their mouth and wiggles the first two fingers of each hand to make teeth like Bugs Bunny. The players on either side hold the hand nearest to the middle person up to the side of their own heads and wave them like big floppy ears. At the same time all three people say "Bunny, bunny, bunny" over and over very quickly.
The middle person of the three looks around the circle (continuing to say "Bunny" and wiggling their teeth) until they choose somebody. They point to that person with their wiggly teeth and nod towards them (as though throwing the bunny across the circle) while saying "Bunny" one last time. That person becomes the new bunny and of course the people on either side provide the new ears.
- b. Mindful Activity: Pass The Cup. Using teamwork and paying attention to what's happening around the classroom, students will pass a cup filled with water without spilling a drop. First the students will pass it with eyes open and then with their eyes closed.
- c. Mindful Activity: Hello Game. Students take turns saying "Hello" to one another and noticing the color of each other's eyes to help focus and practice making eye contact.
- d. Mindful Journal

Lesson Fifteen

15. Connecting/Freedom

a. Game: Stadium Wave. Using teamwork, the class coordinates their movements and create an illusion of a wave. The wave will vary in length and speed, as the game continues.

b. Mindful Activity: Three Things In Common. Students will think of someone that bugs them or they had a disagreement with. The students acknowledge their feelings and think of three things they have in common with the person.

c. Mindful Activity: Still I Feel Lucky. A ball will roll back and forth between students, and the students name things that bother them and things that make them happy.

d. FlipGrid: Students will reflect on their Mindful Activities for the unit, with the following prompt: How has practicing Mindfulness Activities affected you over the course of the two weeks?